



AMELIA EARHART

QUEEN OF THE AIR



High School

Amelia Mary Earhart was born in Atchison, Kansas, on July 24, 1897, the daughter of Samuel "Edwin" Stanton Earhart and Amelia "Amy" Otis Earhart. She had a sister named Muriel, whose nickname was Pidge.

Amelia's upbringing certainly was unconventional for her time. Her mother did not believe in molding her children into "nice little girls." As a child, Amelia spent long hours playing with Pidge, climbing trees, hunting rats with a rifle and "belly-slamming" her sled downhill during snowy winters. In 1904, Amelia and her uncle pieced together a homemade ramp modeled after a roller coaster. They attached the ramp to the family's tool shed and Amelia rode down the ramp in a wooden box. When the wooden box shattered in a crash and Amelia's lip was bruised, she exclaimed, "Oh, Pidge, it's just like flying!"

By the time Amelia was old enough for high school, her family had moved to Chicago. There, Amelia searched for a school with a strong science program and soon discovered Hyde Park High School. After graduating, Amelia continued to research possibilities for her future career. To help her make a decision, she kept a scrapbook of newspaper clippings about successful women in male-dominated fields, such as film production, law, advertising, management and engineering.

In 1920, Amelia and her father visited the airfield from which Amelia took her first ride in an airplane. That ride would change her life forever. She said, "By the time I had got two or three hundred feet off the ground I knew I had to fly."

Six months after her first flight, Amelia purchased a used, bright yellow airplane, which she nicknamed "The Canary." On October 22, 1922, Amelia flew her plane to an altitude of 14,000 feet, setting a world height record for female pilots.

A year after Charles Lindbergh's made his historic solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927, Amelia got a phone call from Captain Hilton H. Bailey, who asked, "Would you like to fly the Atlantic?" Amelia enthusiastically took this opportunity, though she flew only as a passenger, her job being to make entries into the flight log. It wasn't enough for her. After the flight, Amelia said, "I was just baggage, like a sack of potatoes." She added, "Maybe someday I'll try it alone."

Although Amelia gained some fame from her transatlantic flight, she wanted to set a record of her own. So, in August of 1928, Amelia set off on her first extended solo flight, becoming the first woman to fly alone across North America and back. In 1931, she set a world altitude record of 18,415 feet. Because of her slight physical resemblance to Lindbergh, whom the press nicknamed "Lucky Lindy," some reporters began referring to Amelia as "Lady Lindy," or the "Queen of the Air."

At the age of 34, on the morning of May 20, 1932, Amelia set off from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland with the latest copy of a local newspaper to confirm the date of her flight. She intended to fly to Paris in her single engine plane just like Lindbergh, but after a flight lasting 14 hours, 56 minutes, during which she



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battled strong winds, icy conditions and mechanical problems, Amelia landed in a pasture in Northern Ireland. When a farm hand asked, "Have you flown far?" Amelia replied, "From America." Amelia Earhart had become the first woman to fly solo non-stop across the Atlantic.

Between 1930 and 1935, Amelia set seven records in aviation for speed and distance. In 1935, she became the first person to fly solo from Hawaii to California. In the same year, flying her beloved Vega airplane, which she called "Old Bessie," Amelia soloed from Los Angeles to Mexico City. But once again, those accomplishments were not enough for the daring aviatrix. Amelia began to think about a new adventure, a flight she most wanted to attempt – a circumnavigation of the globe at the equator.

In order to prepare for her daring trip, Amelia contacted Hollywood stunt pilot Paul Mantz to help her improve her long distance flying skills. At the same time, she joined the faculty of Purdue University in 1935 as a visiting professor in order to counsel women on aviation careers, serve as technical advisor to the Department of Aeronautics and garner support for her around-the-world flight.

Though not the first pilot to circle the globe, Amelia would choose the longest course at 29,000 miles, following a difficult path that hugged Earth's equator as close as possible. With funding from Purdue, a Lockheed Electra 10E aircraft was built

to her specifications to include, among other things, an especially large fuel tank. Soon, Amelia contacted Fred Noonan to be her navigator since he had plenty of experience in marine as well as aeronautical navigation.

On March 17, 1937, Amelia and her crew flew the first leg of the trip from Oakland, California to Honolulu, Hawaii. In addition to Amelia and Noonan, Harry Manning and the stunt pilot Mantz were on board. Technical problems with the aircraft forced Amelia to abandon continuing the record-setting voyage almost as soon as it had begun.

While the Electra was being repaired, Amelia and her husband, George P. Putnam, a publisher, received additional funds for a second try. This time Amelia began her voyage somewhat in a shroud of secrecy at Oakland, California. Her first leg of the trip was to Miami, Florida. It was there she publicly announced her plans to circumnavigate the globe. The flight's opposite direction, from west to east instead of east to west, was due in part to changes in wind and weather patterns. Noonan would be Amelia's only crewmember on this flight. The two departed Miami on June 1 and, after many stops in South America, Africa, India and Southeast Asia, they arrived at Lae, Papua New Guinea on June 29, 1937. At this stage in the journey, Amelia and Noonan had completed about 22,000 miles of the journey. The remaining 7,000 miles would be over the Pacific Ocean.



On July 2, 1937, Amelia and Noonan took off from Lae, Papua New Guinea in their Electra, which was heavily loaded with fuel. They were heading for Howland Island, a flat sliver of land 2,556 miles away. Amelia's last known position, about 800 miles into her flight, was noted by the United States Coast Guard ship Itasca, which had been assigned to communicate with Amelia's airplane and guide them to the island once they arrived in the sky overhead.

Through a series of misunderstandings or errors, Amelia's final approach to Howland Island using radio failed. One hour after receiving Amelia's last message, the Itasca began its search for the plane north and west of Howland Island. The United States Navy soon joined in the search, and over a period of about three days all of the area around Howland Island was investigated. No sign of the flyer was ever found. Airplanes also flew over the area to the north, west and southwest of Howland Island, based on a possibility the Electra had crashed in the ocean, perhaps leaving the aviators in an emergency raft, but the search yielded nothing.

On July 19, 1937, the official search for Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan was called off, and Amelia was

declared legally dead on January 5, 1939. No confirmed physical evidence of Amelia, Noonan or their airplane has ever been found. Recent expeditions to the remote Pacific island of Nikumaroro, however, have turned up bone fragments, a piece of aluminum matching the type used to build the Electra, and a heel from a women's shoe. Additional searches of the island and surrounding waters are planned.

Although Amelia was not the only female aviator of her time, she was the most famous. She had her own clothing and luggage line, and endorsed multiple products.

Other prominent female aviators included Willa Brown, who was the first African American to earn a commercial flight license in the United States. In addition, Willa helped train more than 200 students who eventually became the Tuskegee Airmen, a famous fighter squadron from World War II. At age 16, Elinor Smith was the youngest pilot to earn a license which was signed by Orville Wright. Another notable pilot was Jacqueline Cochran, the first woman to fly faster than the speed of sound, or Mach 1.

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